

Air Force officers lend a helping hand against weeds

A group of about 25 Royal New Zealand Air Force officer cadets, undertaking a leadership course in the Hanmer Springs township last week, gave thanks to the town that hosted them by clearing broom from a much-visited lake.

Before removing their tented field camp at the Hanmer Springs Forest Camp, the cadets spent a morning carrying out the weed control as part of the Weedbusters programme.

More than 800 schoolchildren, the Canterbury Tactix netball team and several corporate groups had been taking a hand at removing the broom from around Squirrel Lake since last October.

Weedbusters is a national charity run by the Department of Conservation, which bands together volunteers to help control a variety of weeds.

Steve Brodie, who runs Activity Hanmer with his wife Lynne, organised a day of physical and mental challenges for the cadets and suggested the broom removal would be appreciated by the wider community.

Activity Hanmer runs activities for school and corporate groups, and says many participants enjoy 'giving back' to the community.

"Schools have really taken to the Weedbusters work because it fits the curriculum – it's environmental work, they are using tools and it is physical labour – and many enjoy the destruction of the broom," he said.

Among the group of Air Force cadets was former Hanmer Springs resident, Deane Wilson.

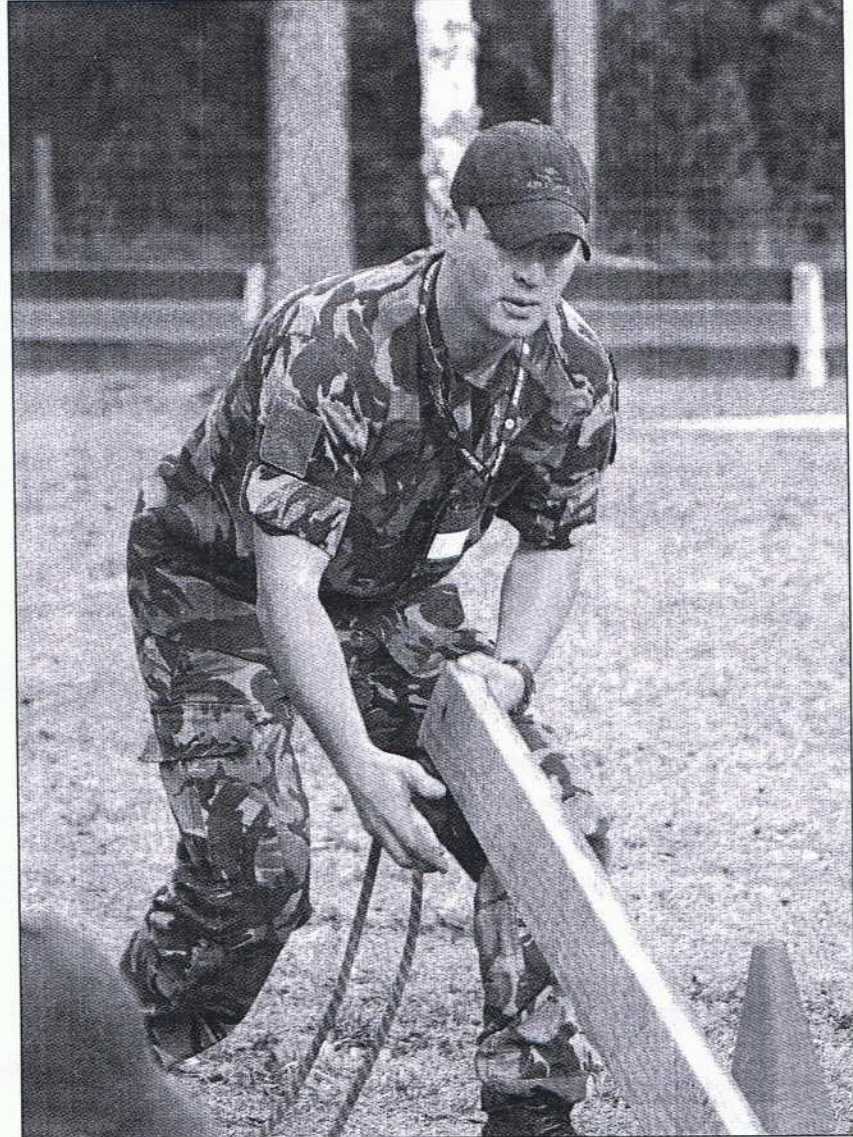
Deane, who will this week graduate as a Pilot Officer, attended Hanmer Springs Primary School and Amuri Area School in the 1990s while living in Hanmer Springs with his family.

Back only once in the intervening years, Deane said the area had grown and changed a great deal.

Squadron leader Phil Bedford said the cadets, on the point of graduation, organised the five-day camp themselves.

It is the first time such a camp has been held in Hanmer Springs, and the venue proved ideal, he said. Its distance from Woodbourne Air Force base near Blenheim meant the cadets had to be particular about having everything they needed.

The Air Force trains its officers from within its own ranks, or takes direct entry cadets for a 23-week training course. Nationally, 120 airmen and



airwomen are recruited each year learning to be medics, technicians, air security or logistics experts, among other trades.

Pilot Officer Steve de Graaf said he joined the Air Force in an undergraduate scheme. The Air Force funded his four years at university and in return, he has an obligation to undertake the same number of years of service, plus one.

He said the officer cadets had enjoyed their week, and were pleased to undertake some community service as a thanks for the use of the area and its surrounds.

Giving something back:

Officer Deane Wilson, a former Hanmer Springs resident, was among the group of officer cadets who trained in the township ahead of their graduation this week.

Deane is pictured participating in a team exercise organised by Activity Hanmer.